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PHONE 1300 362 272

## ADVERTISER SERVICES

Tel: 1300 362 355

### EDITOR

Grant Roff

Email: [mct@bauertrader.com.au](mailto:mct@bauertrader.com.au)

### DEPUTY EDITOR

Chris Harris

Email: [chris.harris@bauertrader.com.au](mailto:chris.harris@bauertrader.com.au)

### SUB-EDITOR

Wolter Kuiper

Email: [wolter.kuiper@bauertrader.com.au](mailto:wolter.kuiper@bauertrader.com.au)

### DESIGN MANAGER

Danielle Beadman

### DESIGNER

Cristian Tapia

### CONTRIBUTORS

Guy Allen, Rob Blackbourn, Sandy Burgoyne, Hamish Cooper, Graeme Crosby, Cam Donald, Ian Falloon, Geoff Hall, John Rooth, Spannerman

### EDITORIAL AND NEWS

Bauer Trader Media

73 Atherton Rd, Oakleigh, Vic 3166

Locked Bag 12, Oakleigh, Vic 3166

Tel: (03) 9567 4200 Fax: (03) 9567 4100

### PHOTOGRAPHY

SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER Ellen Dewar

STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER Nathan Jacobs

### DIGITAL

#### EXECUTIVE DIGITAL CONTENT MANAGER

Guy Allen

#### DIGITAL CONTENT MANAGER

Mary Lee

#### VIDEOGRAPHER

Stephen Dwight

### MARKETING TEAM

#### CORPORATE DESIGNER

Caroline Garde

#### PROMOTIONS MANAGER

Natalie Frazer

### CIRCULATION AND RESEARCH

#### CIRCULATION MANAGER

Stuart Jones

### ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES

#### GROUP SALES MANAGER

Brian Vegh

(02) 9282 8227 [bvegh@bauer-media.com.au](mailto:bvegh@bauer-media.com.au)

#### BRAND SALES MANAGER

Tim Hooper

0402 445 644 [tim.hooper@bauertrader.com.au](mailto:tim.hooper@bauertrader.com.au)

#### AGENCY SALES MANAGER - NSW

Robert Gibbs (02) 9288 9157

[RGibbs@bauer-media.com.au](mailto:RGibbs@bauer-media.com.au)

#### AGENCY SALES MANAGER - VIC

Andrea de Kauwe (03) 9567 4388

[Andrea.deKauwe@bauertrader.com.au](mailto:Andrea.deKauwe@bauertrader.com.au)

#### QLD Todd Anderson

0409 630 733

[todd.anderson@motormedia.com.au](mailto:todd.anderson@motormedia.com.au)

#### SA Chris Karamanov

0439 485 835

[christopher.karamanov@bauertrader.com.au](mailto:christopher.karamanov@bauertrader.com.au)

#### WA Greg Boase

0408 516 176

[greg.boase@bauertrader.com.au](mailto:greg.boase@bauertrader.com.au)

### FINANCE

#### BUSINESS ANALYST

Chris Lobo

#### EXECUTIVE GROUP

#### GENERAL MANAGER TRADER DIGITAL

Nigel Dearing

#### GROUP FINANCE MANAGER

Richard Wein

#### ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER (MOTORING)

Ged Bulmer

#### CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Keith Falconer

### SUBSCRIPTIONS

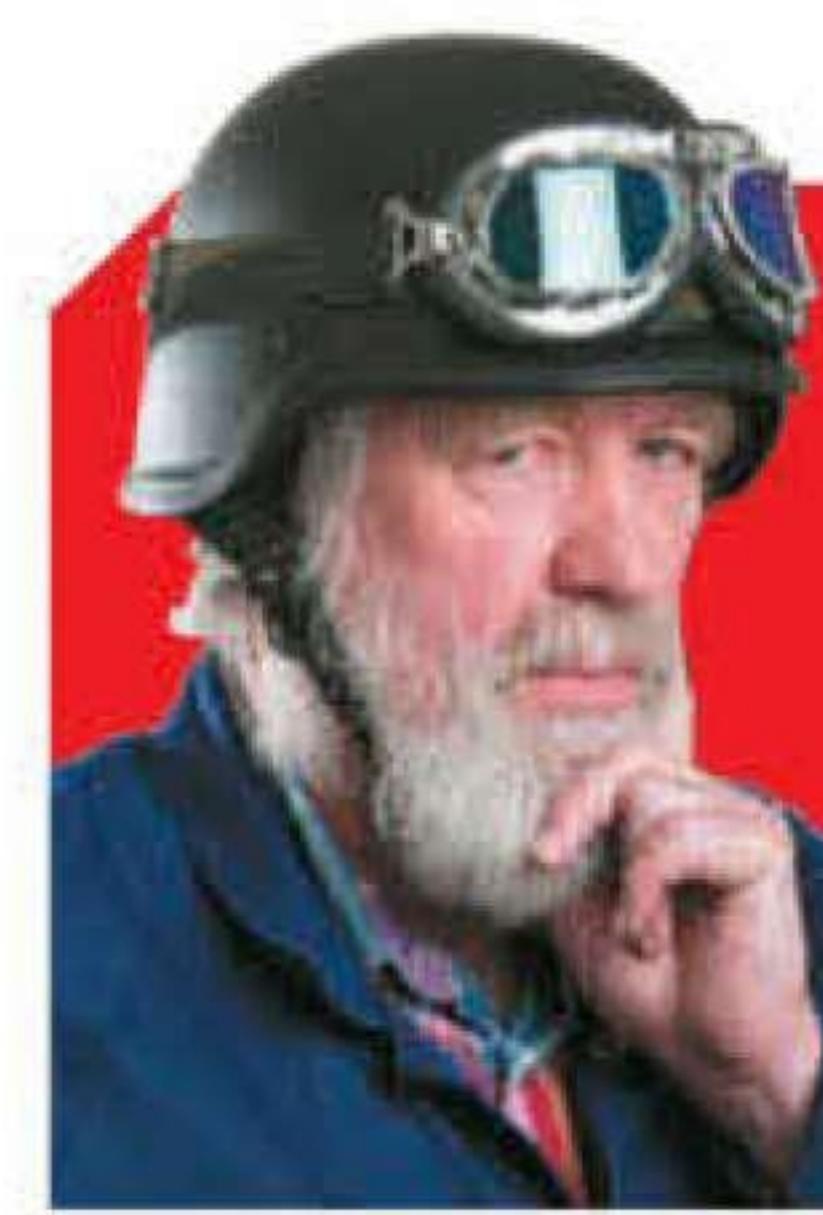
Tel: 136 116 Fax: (02) 9267 4363

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# EDLINE

## Inlandia

It won't matter which of this publishing company's three magazines you buy in the coming months, you'll be reading a lot more about the New England high country. *Australian Motorcycle News* (AMCN), *Australasian Dirt Bike* (ADB) and good ol' MT are all involved in a project to get riders to seriously consider the New England high country as a potential travel destination.

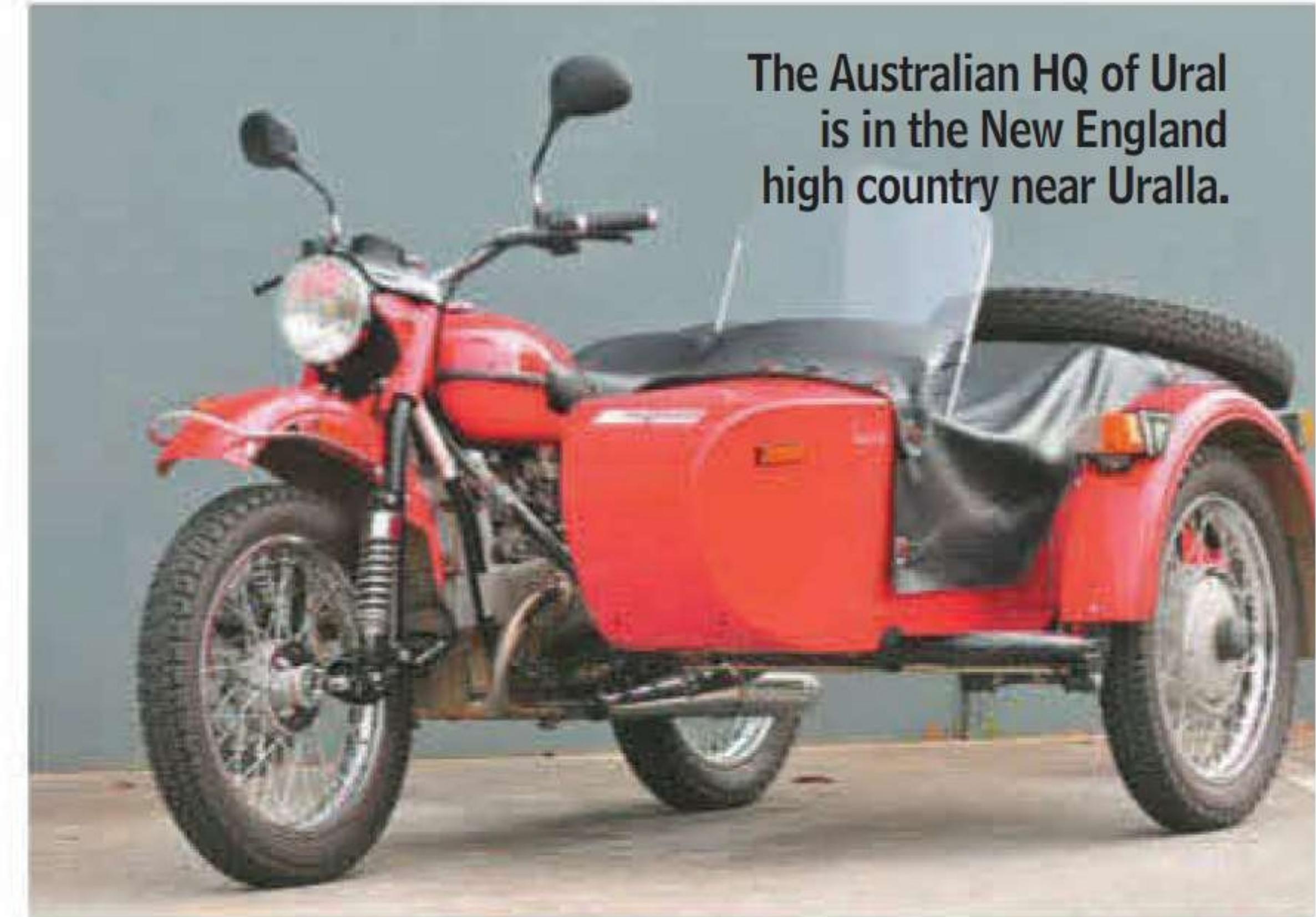
ADB is going to explore the bushranger backroads, visiting remote hideouts and the scenes of the regular Cobb and Co coach robberies. With the help of Dualsport Australia, the result will be maps and route notes you can follow to recreate the journey.

AMCN is going to focus on the excellent rider roads in the district which have more twists than a *Game of Thrones* plot. If you glance up from the road occasionally, you'll see the spectacular waterfalls and epic scenery well known to locals but apparently out of the mind of the thousands of riders who regularly pass through the area without stopping.

MT put its hand up for the luxury touring alternative, which explores the first-class accommodation and fine dining in the area along with an examination of the area's fine arts.

There's a certain irony in this. I lived in the area's capital, Armidale, for three years as a kid and later for two years as a student at the town's university. MT columnist, John Rooth, was there at the same time and I took advantage of him one hung-over morning to buy his Norton Commando for \$450. I've still got it and he still wants it back.

Neither of us were household names in the fine art fraternity. In fact, every time I hear the expression, 'known to the police' in media reports, my thoughts drift back to Armidale.



Fine dining was also a foreign concept. Around 20 of us did a nine-location pub crawl one night finishing up at the newly opened KFC outlet where our designated leader ordered 20 cups of gravy which we were required to scull. I was half way through my cup with the coppers arrived.

The closest we ever came to fine dining was the 'cook your own steak' night at the New England Hotel. The salad bar was free and, with the appetite of large young men, I can't see how they ever made any money out of it.

So here we are, many years later, cruising back into the region thinly disguised as culture vultures. We'll be staying at Peterson's Guest House rather than sleeping by the river out at Blue Holes and we'll be served dinner rather than having to cook it ourselves.

Researching the trip has reminded me that there's a whole lot more to NSW than the bridge and the Opera House. We'll be spending our time in the high country but there are other parts of inland NSW worthy of greater attention. I plead guilty to having become city-centric but it never diminishes the pleasure I always get from riding in the bush. If you're in the New England region in the near future, keep your eye out for us. I'll be the one wearing the top hat.

**— Grant Roff,  
Editor**



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## The MILITOR

"The Motorcycle that is Built and Drives like an Automobile"

Shaft Drive. 3 speeds forward and reverse  
Solo Car with Complete  
Electrical Equipment, includ-  
ing War Tax, \$450. Idler Wheels  
\$25 extra, net., f. o. b. Spring-  
field, Mass.

Pivot floating front axle—channel steel chassis—cantilever spring  
frame and seat suspension—four-cylinder unit power plant—selec-  
tive sliding gear transmission—three speeds forward and reverse—  
shaft drive—starter—idler wheels (can be raised or lowered auto-  
matically from the seat while driving, which makes the Solo Militor  
as easy to drive as an automobile). 40 to 50 miles per gallon of gas.

BUILT upon U. S. Army specifications for War pur-  
poses. Its new type of construction; its great  
strength and endurance; its riding ease and its general  
air of dependability and quality at once established the  
Militor as the looked for and needed development in  
automotive transportation.

Safe, strong and very compact, taking up little room  
to house—remarkably cheap to maintain.

Requests for agencies are coming in from all parts of  
the world. Dealers are recognizing the possibilities of  
and militia duties—and for increased general riding due  
to the thousands of army-trained motor-cyclists now  
back in civil life.

Reputable and successful dealers are invited to write for details

**THE MILITOR CORPORATION**  
GENERAL SALES OFFICES 115 BROADWAY  
NEW YORK

Executive Offices, 111 Broadway, N.Y. Factory

# MILITAIRE MADNESS



Is it a motorcycle? Is it a car? Is it a Militaire or Militor? We send the Bike Detectives in to crack a case that **spans a war and five bankruptcies**

**M**otorcycling's history involves so many myths and legends. Militaire, which operated between 1910 and 1922, is a classic case of both.

It's a myth that it was designed purely to meet America's World War I demand for a battlefield motorcycle. But it created a minor legend by trying (unsuccessfully) to mate the virtues of two- and four-wheeled transportation.

In the pre-war era, there were literally dozens of motorcycle manufacturers. But whereas many of them were simply bolting proprietary engines into their own frames, the various incarnations

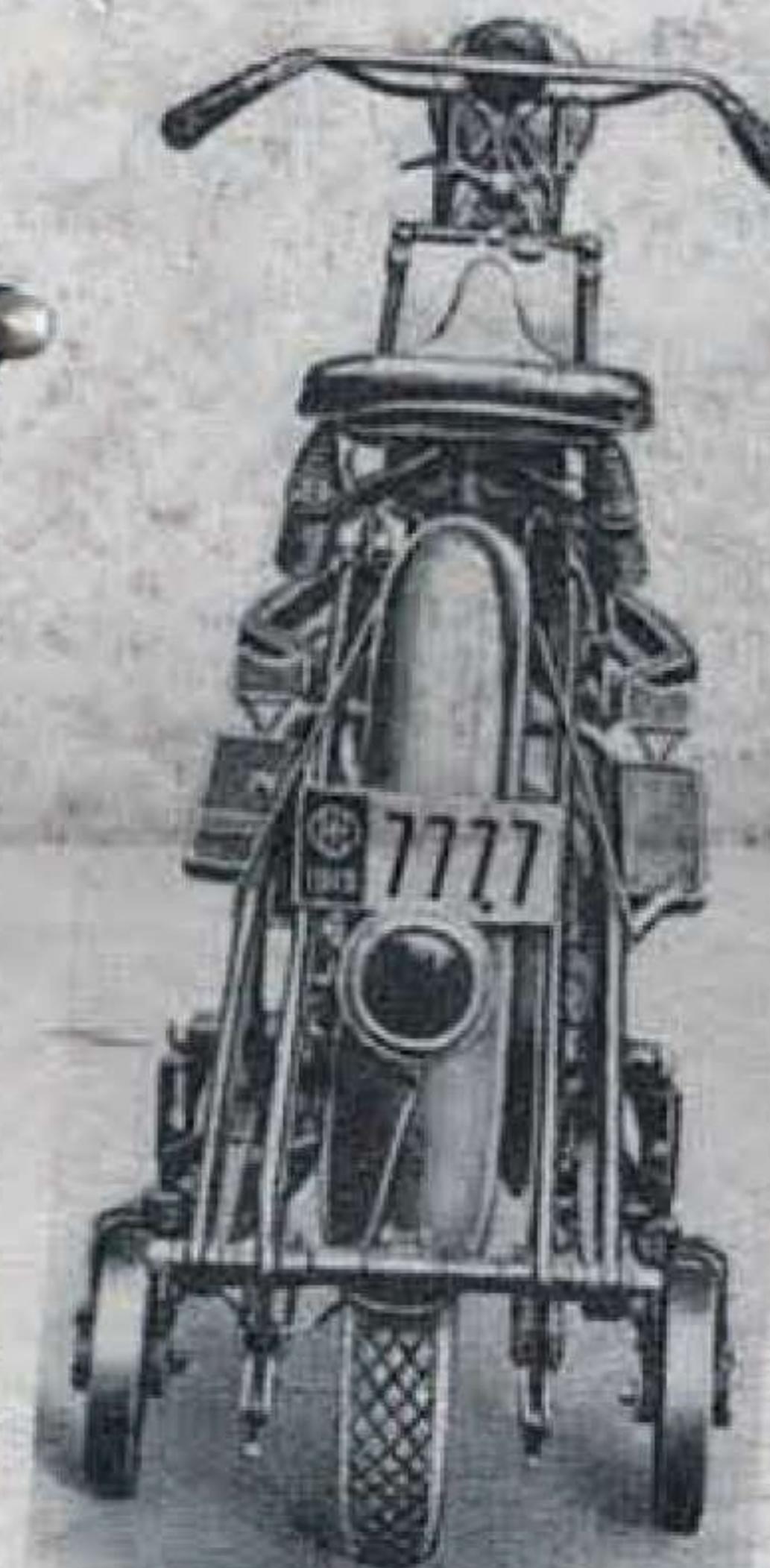
of Militor/Militaire/Militor made 80 per cent of their product in-house. Quite an achievement.

The radical design was first displayed as a prototype in 1910 and put into production in Cleveland, Ohio, the following year with the name Militor. Over the next two decades it would always be marketed extolling the fact it was a motorcycle with car-like qualities.

The original version ran a single-cylinder 480cc engine cooled with a fan. The drivetrain was a combination of shafts and chains. Instead of handlebars the front forks were controlled by a steering wheel! The rider didn't have to put his feet down at intersections because two small "idler wheels"



## MILITAIRE AUTOCYCLE



UNIT POWER PLANT.  
SHAFT DRIVE  
THREE SPEEDS FORWARD  
REVERSE GEAR  
SELF STARTER  
IDLER WHEELS

Militaire Autocycle Co.  
(OF AMERICA, Inc.)  
BUFFALO, N.Y.



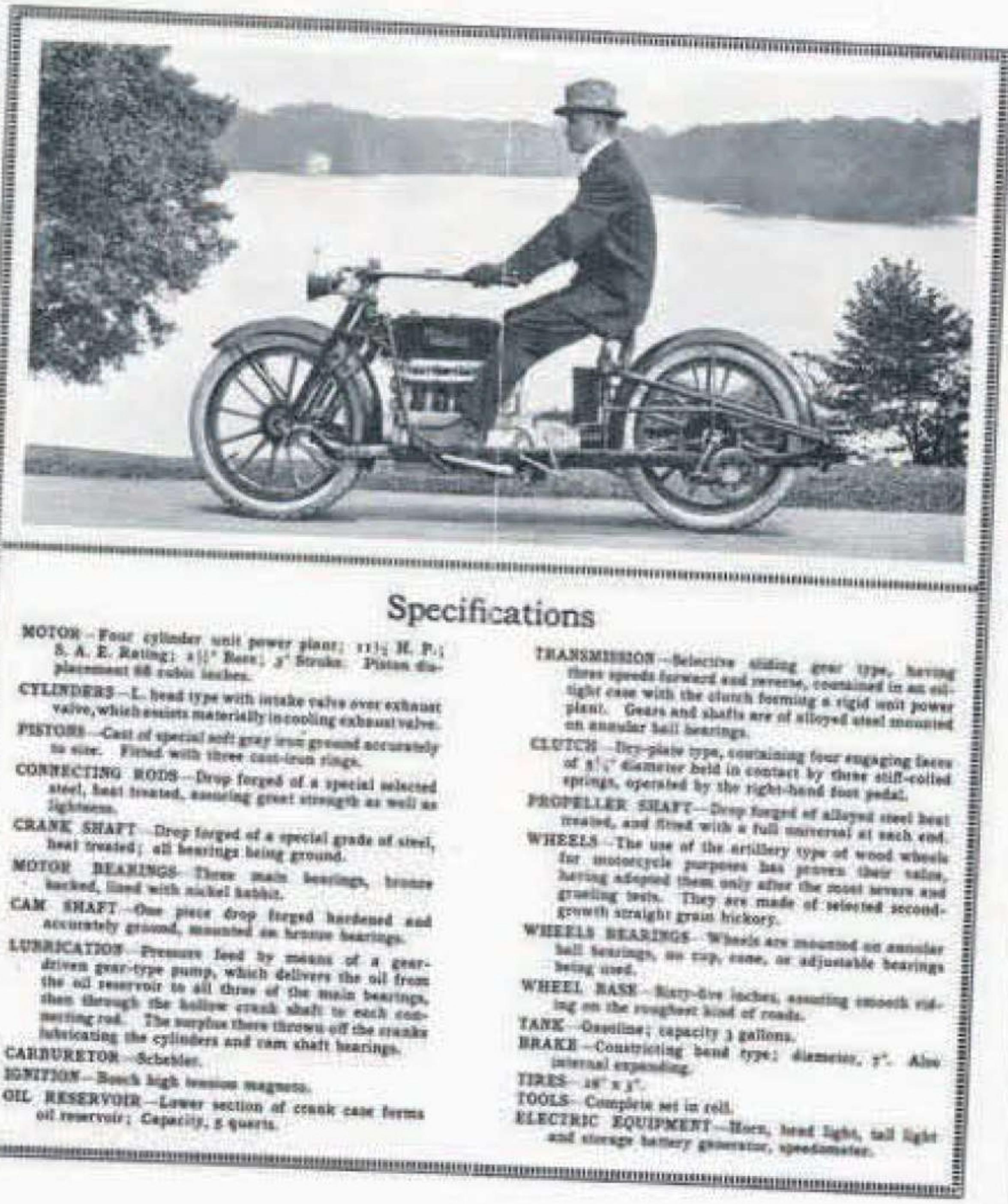
Peter Thomson of Thomson's Motorcycle Museum in Rongotea, (near Palmerston North in NZ), on his original and unrestored Militaire.

could be lowered by a pedal as this "autocycle" slowed. The effect was similar to today's Piaggio's MP3 scooter.

The Militor pre-dated the similar and more common Neracar by a decade and helped sum up an era that pushed the boundaries of innovation.

## MYSTERY MAN

Little is known about charismatic businessman Norman Sinclair, who is an integral part of this story. Some credit him with being the brains of the original operation. Others say he came in when the business first went



### Specifications

**MOTOR** - Four cylinder unit power plant; 1114 H. P.; S. A. E. Rating: 4 1/2 B.H.P.; 3 Stroke. Piston displacement 66 cubic inches.

**CYLINDERS** - L. head type with intake valve over exhaust valve, which assists materially in cooling exhaust valve.

**PISTONS** - Cast of special soft grey iron ground accurately to size. Fitted with three cast-iron rings.

**CONNECTING RODS** - Drop forged of a special selected steel, heat treated, assuring great strength as well as lightness.

**CRANK SHAFT** - Drop forged of a special grade of steel, heat treated; all bearings being ground.

**MOTOR BEARINGS** - Three main bearings, bronze backed, lined with nickel bush.

**CAM SHAFT** - One piece drop forged hardened and accurately ground, mounted on bronze bearings.

**LUBRICATION** - Pressure feed by means of a gear-driven gear-type pump, which delivers the oil from the oil reservoir to all three of the main bearings, then through the hollow crank shaft to each connecting rod. The surplus then throws off the excess lubricating the cylinders and cam shaft bearings.

**CARBURETOR** - Schedler.

**IGNITION** - Bosch high tension magneto.

**OIL RESERVOIR** - Lower section of crank case forms oil reservoir; Capacity, 5 Quarts.

**TRANSMISSION** - Selective sliding gear type, having three speeds forward and reverse, contained in an oil-tight case with the clutch forming a rigid unit power plant. Gears and shafts are of alloyed steel mounted on annular ball bearings.

**CLUTCH** - Dry-plate type, containing four engaging faces of 9 1/2 diameter held in contact by three stiff-coiled springs, operated by the right-hand foot pedal.

**PROPELLER SHAFT** - Drop forged of alloyed steel heat treated, and fitted with a full universal at each end.

**WHEELS** - The use of the artillery type of wood wheels for motor purposes has proven their value, having adopted them only after the most severe and grueling tests. They are made of selected second-growth straight grain hickory.

**WHEEL BEARINGS** - Wheels are mounted on annular ball bearings, or top, cone, or adjustable bearings being used.

**WHEEL BASE** - Sixty-five inches, assuring smooth riding on the roughest kind of roads.

**TANK** - Gasoline; capacity 3 gallons.

**Brake** - Contracting band type; diameter, 7". Also internal expanding.

**TIRES** - 48 x 3 1/2".

**TOOLS** - Complete set in tool box.

**ELECTRIC EQUIPMENT** - Horn, head light, tail light and storage battery generator, speedometer.

bankrupt. Certainly he skilfully pulled the strings in a project that would chew through another four investors.

The original design was licensed to The Champion Motor Car Company in St Louis, Missouri, which sold it for a short time rebadged as a Champion.

These were volatile times for the motor industry and, when Champion went bust soon after, Sinclair ended up with the rights and assets, setting up the Militaire Autocycle Company in Buffalo, New York.

By now the Militor had been radically redesigned. As well as being renamed the Militaire Autocycle, it was now powered by a car-like, 1114cc inline four-cylinder engine with the crankcase acting as a stressed member of the frame.

In a time when most motorcycle engines ran a total-loss, drip-feed system, the Militaire had a gear-type oil pump. This pressure-fed oil from the crankcase reservoir to the main bearings, then through a tunnel in the crankshaft to the conrods.

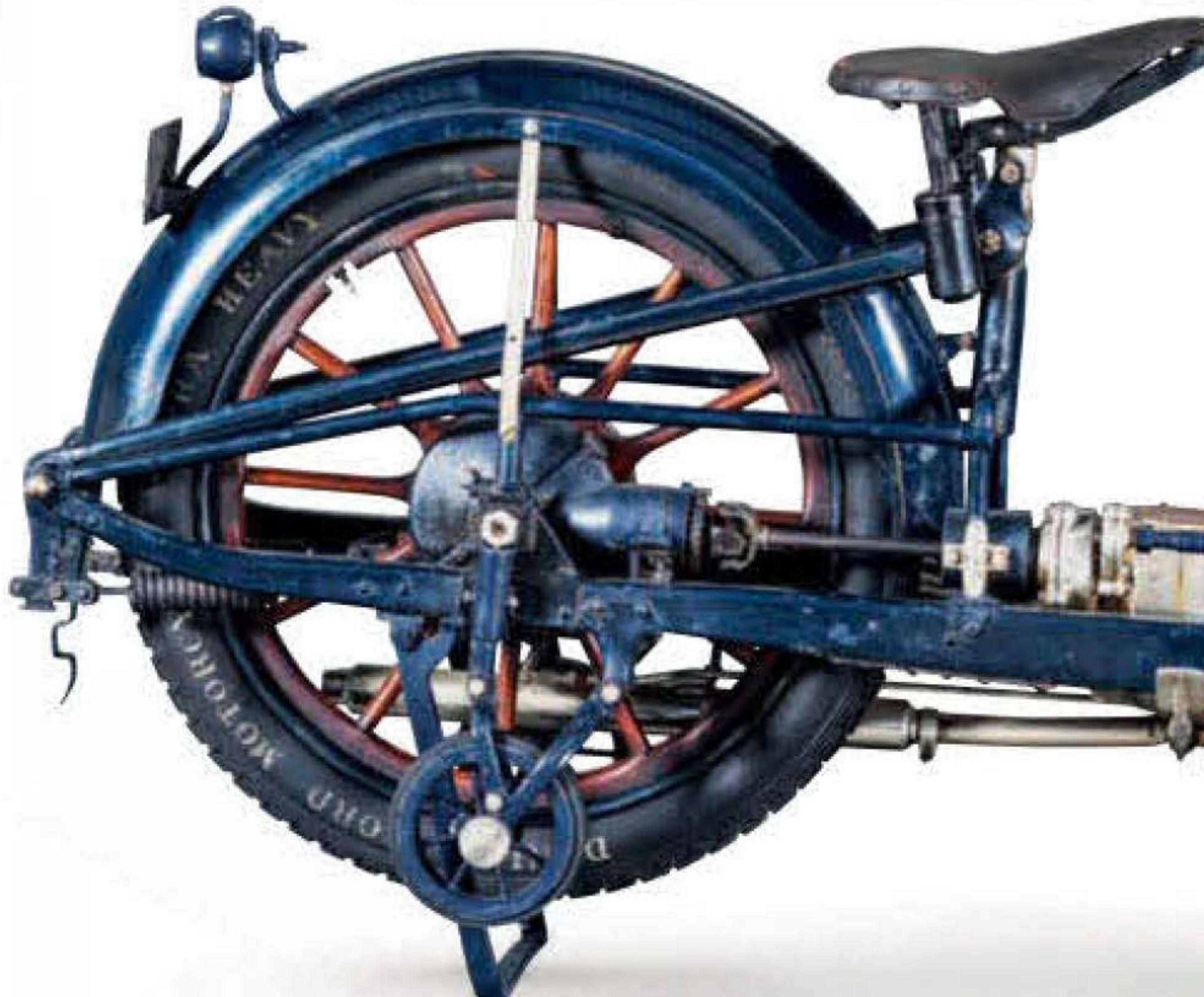
The engine employed the-then popular inlet-over-exhaust configuration, sometimes called the pocket valve (which predated the flathead design). The intake valves were located in the cylinder head with exhaust valves in the cylinder block.

The clutch and brakes were foot-operated and the gearbox (three speeds forward and a reverse) was controlled





**“Instead of handlebars the front forks were controlled by a steering wheel!”**



by a hand lever in a car-like H-gate-shift pattern. Final drive was by shafts and a differential.

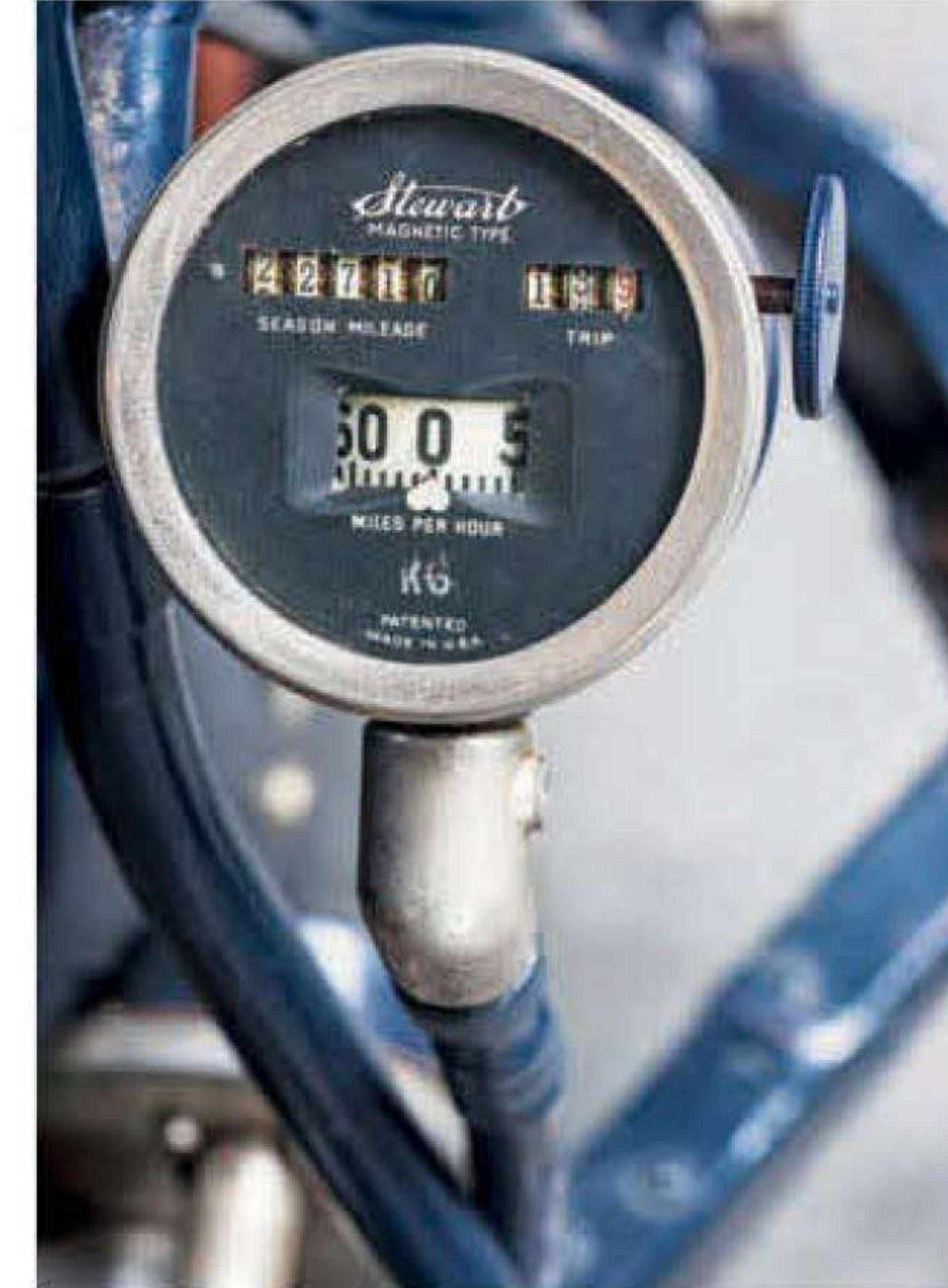
It didn't have a kick-starter, but rather a step-starter. This pedal at the rear of the running board activated a set of linkages to the flywheel.

#### HUB-CENTRE MYTH

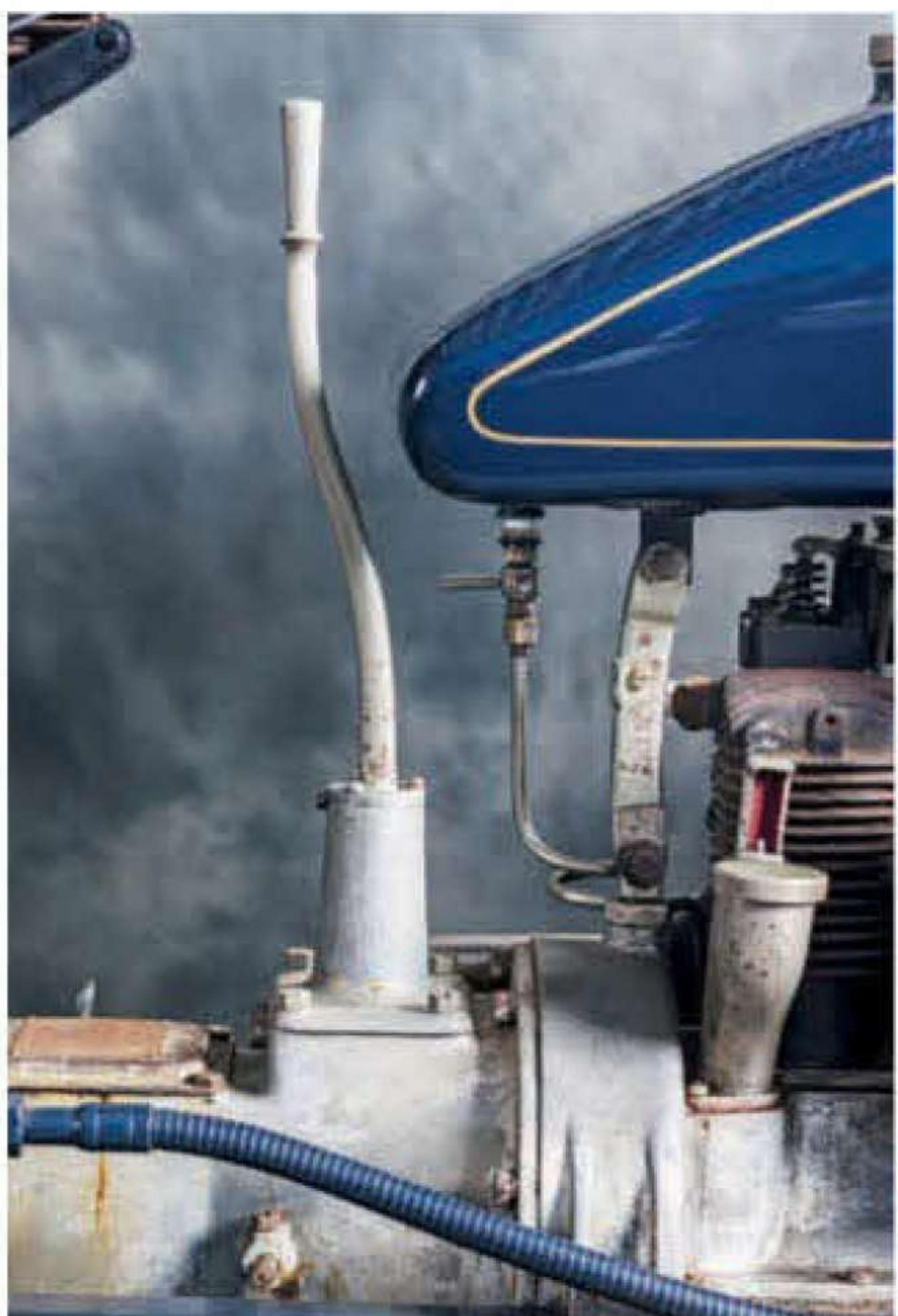
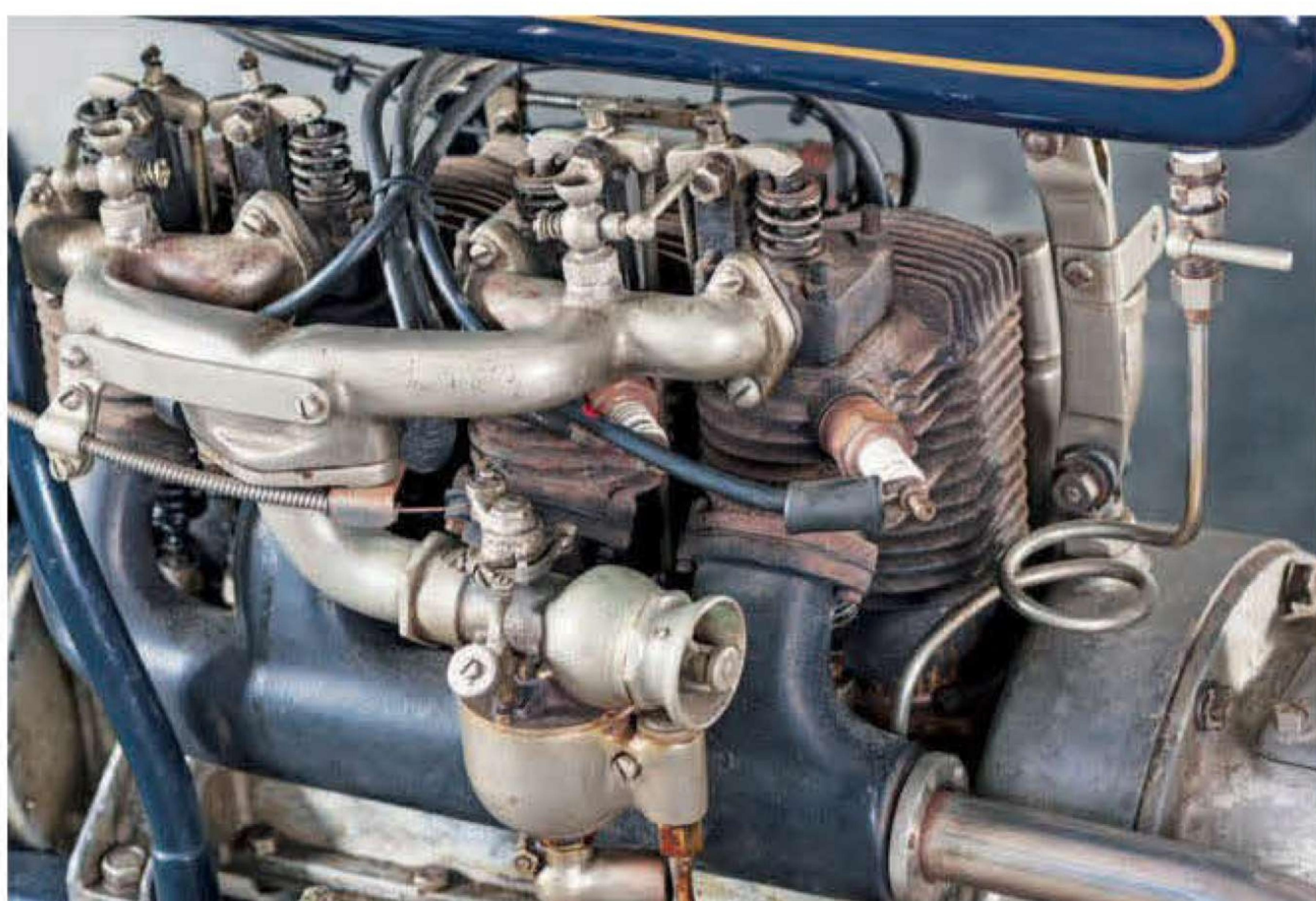
Many historians refer to this motorcycle as having hub-centre steering. It doesn't. Steering was by a type of girder fork (with stiffening and leaf springs at the bottom) connected to an articulated steering neck through which the axle ran. Look at the photos closely and you will see that the fork is part of the main frame and lateral movement is via the curved axle. Company literature always described “a pivoted front axle [patented]”.

Another unusual feature was the cantilever seat arrangement, whereby the entire rear subframe is basically a suspension system. Of course, the car-like, channel-steel chassis and all this innovative approach to suspension had the side effect of creating a very heavy motorcycle. Add in the artillery wheels and the complete package weighed more than 350kg.

However, the overall dimensions were no more excessive than the popular Henderson four-cylinder motorcycle. The 11.5hp engine could propel the Militaire Autocycle to 50km/h, pretty fast for the day.



This 1914 model uses acetylene held in a pressurised tank for the lighting, but by the following year electric lights were fitted.



### SALES SPIEL

There was no holding back the confidence of the relaunched Militaire company in 1914, the year of the black version shown here that is on display in the National Motorcycle Museum in Nabiac, NSW.

“The Militaire Autocycle is not an experiment,” the sales brochure trumpeted. It listed N.R Sinclair as president of a company that claimed to have \$US250,000 in capital.

“Model after model has been built, weaknesses located and eliminated one at a time until the machine is mechanically perfect,” the brochure continued.

“This process has been expensive but the result is a machine which will stand up as well and as long as the highest grade automobile.”

It was also claimed that the company was backed by “some of the wealthiest and most conservative businessmen

**Hand-controlled gear lever features car-like H-pattern with three forward gears and reverse.**

and financiers in New York State”.

But what of some of the wacky design features, such as wooden wheels in a time when spoked wheels were a proven product? “The use of the artillery type of wood wheels for motorcycle purposes has proven their value,” the firm stated, speaking of adopting them “only after the most severe and gruelling tests”.

“They are made of selected second-growth straight grain hickory,” the firm added, making wood sound like some exotic material.

### REALITY BITES

Sales were slow. Some claim less than 200 Militaires were sold. But the company seemed undeterred, exporting to private buyers around the world, even some in Australia and New Zealand.

It was marketed at travelling salesmen and gentlemen “who own



This 1920 Militor sidecar on display at the Barber Museum has the overhead-valve 1434cc engine.

a large car and desire a light vehicle to get about at times quickly and economically". Another sales target was "young men of refinement to whom formerly motorcycles never appealed ... no peddling or straddling with feet on the ground".

Perhaps the biggest potential was for military and police use. Various companies were vying for lucrative government contracts as the US geared up to enter World War I.

When it went to Europe in early 1917 the Army took a few Militaires with it. They were a complete disaster and sunk to their axles in the mud of the Western Front.

Soon Sinclair had gone belly up and a new company was formed, called the Militor Corporation of New Jersey. Amazingly, a sales poster of this time described the Militor as being "built upon US Army specifications for war purposes".

Perhaps it was being more truthful when it claimed it was "the motorcycle that is built and drives like a car".

The business struggled along until 1919, when Sinclair managed to get the project under the wing of car maker Knox Motors, of Springfield, Massachusetts. But not much came of that liaison and the rights and assets were acquired by the Bullard Machine Tool Company, again with Sinclair in a lead role. He must have been a slick corporate salesman.

Their Bridgeport, Connecticut, factory



began a small run before the bike died a natural death in 1922 and Sinclair drifted off into historical oblivion.

By this time the engine had grown to 1306cc in side-valve form, and then became 1434cc with overhead valves. It had also abandoned the idler wheels and was being sold as a complete sidecar. The green 1920 Militor sidecar shown on this page is on display at the Barber Museum in Birmingham, Alabama, US.

Incredibly, five different investment groups lost money on this amazing machine between 1910 and 1922. Probably only two dozen exist as complete motorcycles. One of the few in running order is the unrestored one shown being ridden by Peter Thomson of Thomson's Motorcycle Museum in Rongotea, New Zealand.

It was a brave idea and a brave decision to market such a wacky two-wheeler. ■